

## **Render Unto Caesar, Mark 12:13-17**

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And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians to trap him in his talk. And they came and said to him, Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

Should we pay them or should we not? But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it. And they brought him one, and he said to them, whose likeness and inscription is this? They said to him, Caesars. Jesus said to them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesars, and to God the things that are God's.

And they marveled at him. Let's pray. Gracious Father, we pray that our response is far more than just marveling at the cleverness and the wisdom and the untrappability of the Son.

Since the beginning of the existence of God's people, there's always been this challenging, tense sort of relationship between the Kingdom of Heaven and its citizens, and the Kingdom of Earth and its citizens.

The citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven have always had a tenuous, troubled, challenging relationship with the rulers of the Kingdom of Earth. From the very beginning, this has been a reality among God's people. We think of just the initial creation of the chosen people who would receive the revelations, receive the scriptures, and receive the prophets.

Speaking of ethnic Israel, in the beginning, they weren't even a nation. And they still had tension with the kingdoms of the earth under which they lived. Such as, of course, you can forget Egypt. And that whole tumultuous relationship there, but then even after that, when God made of them a nation, there was still this strange, odd, sort of dubious existence in which they live here on earth, but they're citizens of a greater kingdom.

God established this theocracy in ancient Israel, the only theocracy ever known to man, the only true theocracy ever known. And the existence of man, a theocracy is just simply God's direct rule of people, not by way of a government, but his direct rule of people, the theocracy of ancient Israel was supposed to represent the relationship between God and his people.

And that whole relationship began, of course, when the prophets who were the spokespeople of God were also the leaders. They were also the civil leaders, Moses, Samuel, you think of such figures as that. They both heard from God. And they dictated the civil rules to the people. Well, then the people, of course, clamored to have a king like the other nations around them, and God established kings for them, but still the relationship was to be the same.

There were to be prophets, and there were to be kings, and the kings would rule over the people, but the prophets ruled over the kings. And so the prophets were to hear the word of God and say to the kings, This is what God has said, and the kings were to submit. To what the prophets said and we know through the reading of the books of Samuel books of the Kings the book of the

Chronicles We know that more often than not that's not actually how it worked That the kings would not listen to the prophets or more often than not, the kings would find their own prophets who would say what they wanted them to say, and they would listen to them pretending to be listening to God.

And so this theocracy thing was, this picture of God's relationship to his people in which he directly rules his people, but it rarely actually worked out like that. But then we fast forward to the New Testament to that. Day on the in the upper room in which the Holy Spirit comes that day of Pentecost and the creation of the church and since that moment, God's people have navigated or sought to navigate this tenuous, troublesome relationship that is, quite frankly, sometimes difficult to understand, difficult to work through.

This relationship between the rulers of the Kingdom of Earth And the ruler, of course, of the kingdom of heaven. This is represented, of course, in the life of Jesus. As Jesus here, in our passage, we just read this earlier, Jesus is going to proclaim, He's going to teach these people who are coming to Him with this question, meant to trap Him.

He's going to say to them, submit to the rules, submit to the laws of the government that rules over you. Knowing full well that in just two days, that very same government will crucify Him. But then, of course, this continues as we see the representative in Mark's gospel of the kingdom of earth, the representative, the spokesman, so to speak, of the kingdom on earth in Mark's gospel is the centurion of chapter 15, who represents the authority of Rome, who himself will say, surely this man was the son of God.

But then the relationship just gets more tumultuous after that, as we begin to look at the early church and we see people like Peter and Paul who will both declare the government who rules over us deserves our submission and our obedience, yet that very same government will put them to death. Paul himself some nine times in the book of Acts.

will speak of his Roman citizenship. On several occasions, he will appeal to his Roman citizenship in order to deliver him from perhaps a beating or an imprisonment. But over overall to advance the cause of the gospel because it is his roman citizenship to which he appeals That gives him the right to go to Caesar and present the gospel to Caesar there in Rome Or we think of just the overall situation during Paul's life peter's life the apostle's life This *pax romana* that we've spoken of before this peace of Rome This peace that Rome provided, the safety of travel, the commerce that Rome provided, all of which was a powerful context for the furtherance of the gospel.

Yet, at the same time, the Roman Caesar that, at that time, by the end of the life of Peter and Paul, is going to be Nero, that same Roman emperor will put both of them to death. Both of those men who will write so highly and so clearly that we'll look at in just a few moments in our message this morning, they will speak so emphatically about honoring the emperor, the same emperor who will execute them.

So we have this tumultuous relationship that has given Christians difficulties for millennia of how do we really rightly understand how we are to relate. To the civil government that is placed in rulership above us. And then we fast forward, of course, to the modern church era. Era, the modern church era in which the church today exists as a church that is a product of this very deep and powerful reformation that took place in the 15th century.

That reformation was necessitated by the emperor of Rome, Constantine in the fourth century himself, declaring to be a convert to Roman faith, I mean to Christian faith. I don't know of a single serious historian that believes that that conversion was genuine. It was politically motivated. It was motivated for military gain.

And nobody in their right mind who reads the account of that conversion believes that that was a genuine conversion to faith. Yet in the 4th century, the Roman Emperor accepts Christianity as the religion of the Empire. And from that moment, this faith known as Christianity shifts from being something that's disdained and conflicted by the government to being something that's disdained and conflicted by the government.

to a relationship of favor in which the government accepts that as the official religion of the land. All of that was the seeds of the problems that would require the reformation of the 16th century in order to correct. Because when the church goes from a relationship with its con with its culture around it and its government, a relationship of conflict, to a relationship of favor, what always happens is the church becomes perverted and impure.

And so we see that happening. But then, now we think back to our context today, our modern Western context in which we have lived for a good two centuries under a civil government that is mostly friendly to Christian faith. At times it has been very friendly to Christian faith. We are approaching a time in which it is becoming obviously less friendly to Christian faith.

And we, I think, collectively are beginning to share some deep concerns over our government and the future of our government, particularly this past Thursday when a certain event took place in a courtroom in Manhattan. I think many of us will begin to see this as a very troublesome time. In which we begin to reevaluate the, well, the, the authenticity, the genuineness of the government, the civil government that is above us, the veracity of that government.

And so it's at such times like these that Christians are particularly pressed and pressed hard to think well about how the Scriptures teach us that we are to relate to the civil government that is in authority above us. And it's with that frame of mind that we now turn to the Scriptures, beginning from Mark 12, verse 13, in which this very problem is addressed.

Now, the issue, the reality, if you will, of how does the Christian relate to the government that's in power over them, that's a very thorny issue, it's a complex issue, that one passage of Scripture in no way is going to answer all of those questions. But I think at the very least, Jesus will lay a framework for us, a framework from which we can use as a perspective to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in answering a whole myriad of questions that relate to our context today about the civil authorities who are in authority over us, who live in this culture, the same culture in which our church exists.

And so it's to this passage that we now turn, expecting Jesus to give us a foundation, a direction, to For which that we can focus our thoughts and our Holy Spirit directed energies. So we began the passage from verse 13, and then they sent to him some of the Pharisees. So the, they there, let's just be, clear in our understanding of who the they is.

The, they is the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders. who are intent upon not just putting Jesus to death. If all they wanted to do was put Jesus to death, they would be seeking to assassinate Him. But they

need to do more than just put Him to death, because that would just simply make Him a martyr. They must, first of all, discredit Him.

They must discredit Him before the people. And having discredited Him before the people, they want to have the Roman authorities either arrest Him and keep Him incarcerated, or put Him to death. Either way, they must discredit Him before the people first, and then do away with him. So it's the same group of people, the they, the Sanhedrin, who are still seeking to do this, but we read here that they sent to him some of the Pharisees.

So it's not the Sanhedrin themselves, it's not the chief priests themselves who come to Jesus. But instead they send Pharisees, some of the Pharisees. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 22, verse 16, tells us that some of the disciples of the Pharisees were sent to Jesus. So apparently here, the line of thinking is that they're going to send some people that perhaps Jesus hasn't engaged before, hoping he won't recognize them, because as we're going to see in their question, they're going to feign a type of devotion, a type of belief in Jesus.

Hoping to use that against him. So it makes sense that they're going to send some people that perhaps Jesus hasn't confronted before. Perhaps he won't recognize them. Some disciples of the Pharisees will be sent to them. But in sending these disciples of the Pharisees, we read from Luke chapter 20, verse 20, they watched him and they sent What Luke calls spies who pretended to be sincere that they might catch him and something he said So Mark says that they sent him some of the Pharisees some disciples of the Pharisees Luke calls them spies who?

Pretended to be sincere and then we read some of the Herodians to trap him in his talk Now that word that Mark uses there for trap is the only time it's used in the scriptures a verb But there is a noun form of it that is used once in Luke's gospel To indicate a catch of fish and that one of those instances when they're talking about a catch of fish when Jesus is saying What was the catch in Luke chapter 6?

It's the same with the noun form of this verb and what the word really means is it's a word That's a fishing term and it means to entrap or to catch fish by way of of a net So really it has behind it the idea of deception, because that's really, really if you think about it, that's what phishing is. I don't know if you've ever been phishing and you've ever really thought deeply and philosophically about what you're doing.

Has anybody ever think philosophically when you're, when you're phishing, or is it only me? But if you've ever thought philosophically about what you're doing as you're phishing, you are taking a hook which is very sharp and usually barbed and it will stick into a fish and it will stay there and you're taking that hook and you're disguising it with something that either looks like food or is food and you're taking that food and you're covering over the hook and you're placing it before the fish as if to say Look, here's some nice food for you.

Would you like, would you like a meal? Think of this meal. When in reality, you are seeking to make a meal of them. That's what fishing is. Fishing is incredibly deceptive. You're trying to deceive the fish into thinking that you're doing something good for it, that you're feeding it, but you're really trying to catch it yourself.

And that's really the sense of what Mark is talking about here. They're coming to Jesus and Seeking to convince him that they are on his side, that they believe him, that they believe his

words. But they just have this question that they want him to clarify. You see, they're baiting him with something that looks like food, but it's really a hook.

It's really a trap. So they come to him to trap him in his talk. But look at the group that comes to him. Some of the Pharisees or disciples of the Pharisees, and the Herodians. Now that is one of the most strange bedfellows that history has ever shown us. The Pharisees and the Herodians. This is not the first time that we've seen these two groups team up together.

We saw them team up way back in chapter three when we read that the Pharisees went out and immediately held council with the Herodians against them. How to destroy him. So we might, on the surface value there, realize, okay, there's, here's, here's two groups of people. They probably have different beliefs, but they're coming together to team up with one another against Jesus.

But that really wouldn't do it justice because the Pharisees and the Herodians, I don't know how you could find two groups of people that are more opposite than one another than the Pharisees. The Pharisees were, as you are probably familiar, the theological conservatives. They were the ones who believed that Israel's problems were all due to the fact that Israel has forsaken the Word of God.

And so their mission is to get back to the Word. That's why they were so Scripture focused. Torah focused. And so they believe that that Israel never should be in bondage under Rome, never should be subject under Rome. The fact that Israel is under Rome's thumb is due to Israel's sin because that's what the prophets said, that this is coming.

So they believe that and so inherently they hate Rome. They see Rome as God's arm of judgment against Israel. And they are never going to be in favor of paying taxes to Caesar. But then the other group that we see here are the Herodians. And you don't even need to really know much about the Herodians to know at least something about what they were about, because it's right there in their name.

Herod? Herodians? They were the ones who were the supporters of Herod. So in the supporters of Herod, let's remind ourselves of who Herod was. King Herod's dead now. He's long dead. He died in 4 BC. Right now in rulership over the land of Israel would be Herod Archelaus, one of his sons. He was the prefect of Rome over Judea at this time, but he's still one of the Herodians.

So who are the Herodians? The Herodians were a group of people that were from an ethnic group known as the Idumeans. The Idumeans is just, that's another name for Edomites. Remember the Old Testament conflict between Israel and the Edomites, and how that conflict has never gone away. So Herod Aus, who is ruling Judea right now, is not even a Jew.

He is an Aian, which is sort of a quasi-Jew, sort of a kind of, sort of a cousin to the Jews, but he's definitely not Jewish. But beyond that, he is an arm of Caesar. He pays tribute to Caesar. He has his power because Caesar has put him there, and the Herodians are the ones who are devoted to him, who are his devotees.

And so, they would feel about paying taxes as, well, taxes are what support us. That's what supports Herod. The tax, the collection of taxes, that's the power that Caesar has given to Herod.

Herod Archelaus, our hero. And so there would literally not be a single thing that the Pharisees and the Herodians would ever agree about.

If you could get them in the same room, there would be nothing that they would ever agree about, except one thing. They hate this guy, Jesus, and they want to get rid of this guy, Jesus. And so the old adage, the enemy of my enemy is my friend. And so some very, very strange bedfellows have been made here between the Herodians and the Pharisees, but they send him this group to him to trap him in his talk.

Verse 14, and they came to him and they said to him, teacher, notice their teacher rabbi. That's the same title that was used by Peter as he was observing the tree that had been cursed. He says, rabbi, look, this tree that you cursed yesterday is now dead. That stands in contrast. Remember, we talked about how that contrasts against the title used by Simon Bartimaeus.

Which is not rabbi, but *rabboni*, which is my master and teacher. So they come to him with this generic sort of rabbi teacher. We know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion for you're not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

Should we pay them or should we not? So there comes the question. Of course, it's preceded by a great deal of flattery. Their tactic is to flatter Jesus, to butter him up with these compliments, and notice how what they say is all completely true. But this points out for us the difference between flattery and encouragement.

There's an important difference to see here between flattery and encouragement. Scripture, of course, condemns flattery in all its forms. The Proverbs is very vocal about flattering lips and what an abomination to God flattering lips are. But notice that the substance of what they say is 100 percent true.

Is it true that Jesus is true? He is truth embodied. Is it true that he doesn't care about anyone's opinions? That's not to say that he has no regard for people's opinions. What that means is that the opinions of people don't factor into what he teaches. Jesus is not like the politician who reads the polls to see what people are thinking today, and that's what decides what he believes.

Instead, Jesus is the one that regardless of what people think, he will teach the truth. That's what he means by you do not regard or care about people's opinions. Is that true? That's absolutely true. For you're not swayed by appearances. Is Jesus swayed by appearances? Absolutely not. For you truly teach the way of God.

So all the things that he says are absolutely true about Jesus. The only difference between encouragement and flattery is what? Motive. That's the only difference. Motive. Why are you saying these things? He's saying these things for a sinful motive, and that's the only difference between flattery and encouragement this is a great reminder for us of just the nature of sin sin is not just as simple and as Black and white as doing certain things or not doing other certain things sin cannot be boiled down To such a simple thing as that because sin is more involved.

It's more complex than that It's not just what you do. It's why you do it You It's the motive behind what you did. That's the complex nature of human sin. And so here we see a great example of the

very same words are spoken by one with a sinful motive, and for that one that's sin. The very same thing to be spoken by someone who is praising Jesus.

Jesus, we know you are the truth. And we know that you teach from God, and we know that you're not swayed by appearances. One who loves Jesus can say those words and give Him glory. Another can hate Jesus and say the very same words and be flattering Him. But that's the tactic here. They come to Him with this flattery.

Teacher, we know that you're true, do not care about anyone's opinions, for you're not swayed by appearances. But truly teach the way of God. By the way, if they really did believe that in their hearts, then first of all, why would they be trying to sway Him by appearances? Because that's precisely what they're trying to do.

They're trying to sway him by the appearance that they are in his corner. That's the first thing to see. But truly, if they believe this in their hearts, you know, we always want to be careful, I think, in putting words in Jesus mouth. And I'm not trying to put words in Jesus mouth. But isn't it true here?

That once they say this, once they say, Teacher, we know that you're from God, and you teach from God, and we know that you're true, and we know that you're not swayed by people's opinions, but you truly teach the Word of God. Could Jesus not have said, Wait right there. If that's really true, why are you not my followers?

If that's really true, why have you not been following me? If you really believe what you just said, but nevertheless, you're not swayed by appearances, but surely teach the way of God Here's the question. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay them or should we not? So there's the question and it's a thorny question.

We can recognize right away that it's a thorny question Nobody wants to pay taxes. You might be really thrilled about April 15th and paying taxes Nobody wants to do that people in Jesus's day were just like people today. We don't want to pay these taxes And so the question here is a thorny one, and we can see on the surface just what a clever design it is to ask Jesus such a question in the presence of the Herodians and the Pharisees, not to say all the other people that are around Jesus.

All those people around Jesus who themselves have strong opinions about the Roman government and the taxes that they pay. And so here Jesus, they're trying to put him on the spot. They're trying to back him into a corner. Give us an answer. Yes or no? Is it right or is it wrong to pay these taxes? So let's just talk for a little bit about these taxes that they pay and let's just try to come to some understanding of just how offensive What a, well, I should say what a difficult issue this was for the Israelite to think through because it's a question that goes Deeper than just do we like the Roman government is the Roman government treating us fairly are these taxes being used wisely?

And are the taxes too high? it's really a much deeper question than that because the question really has within it a an element of Well, is it right for a godless pagan nation to yoke the people of God in order to do their work for them? Because that's really what's happening here. The Romans taxed people.

And as we've mentioned before, the predominant way of gaining tax income in the Roman Empire was to tax travel. So when people were traveling the Roman roads, we've all heard about the

Roman roads and the quality and the safety of the Roman roads. Well, those roads weren't free. And so those roads were heavily taxed when you used them.

And they generated a great deal of income for the Roman Empire. But the Romans also taxed just beyond the use of roads and the use of infrastructure, they also taxed land, property, and they taxed people. And so the theological issue really came to bear when the ancient Israelite would think of it in terms like this.

Is it right for a godless pagan Caesar To use the promised land of God to fund their pagan empire. And so when you think of it in those terms, it becomes a more difficult theological question, doesn't it? Is it right for the pagan Caesar to yoke the promised people of God, the chosen people of God, in order to fund their pagan empire?

That's a little bit different than taxing your labor or taxing your travel. That's taxing you. That's taxing the promised land itself. And so that was really a wide open door for them to swing this door open before Jesus and say, Jesus, we really have got you on this issue because nobody else is really agreeing upon it.

This is an issue that's really to the core of the fabric of our nation, in which people just find it a really difficult time to come together on this issue. So let's put you in the corner. Let's put you on the spot. What do you say? Is it lawful to pay these taxes or not? So the taxes that they're referring to are, let's talk for just a minute about these specific taxes.

This was a head tax. In fact, in the passage, when we read that word taxes, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar? That word taxes is the same word as census. And so what this is, is a census tax. So the tax that he's referring to is the tax that began in Luke chapter 2. We all remember Luke chapter 2. When all the world went to be registered, it was the first year of Quirinius, who was the governor of Syria.

That's the taxes being referred to. I want to take this opportunity to spend maybe about 90 seconds or so, maybe two minutes, just to tell you some background about that tax that will, well, maybe it'd be a little bit surprising to us, but, hopefully overall, this will be helpful because what I want to do is I want to show to us.

a difficulty in the scriptures that we don't have a solution for. And you might say, well why are we talking about that on Sunday morning? A difficulty in the scriptures that we don't have a solution for? It's to know and to have confidence. Our confidence is in the scriptures, not in the archaeological evidence.

I'm always quick to point out all these instances that we come across in Mark's gospel in which Archaeologists have said this that contradicts the scriptural account, but they're not looking at this properly, or they've not regarded this evidence, or they've not regarded this solution. And here's a great, this solution explains it all.

I'm quick to point those out. I also want to be transparent to point out those times when we come across one in which we don't have a solution, which there's not a solution that's apparent to us. And one of the big ones is the tax that was imposed that was connected to Jesus's birth. So, Matthew, in Matthew's Gospel, tells us that Jesus was born when Herod was king.



We assume that that means Herod the Great, although it could mean his son Herod Archelaus, but it probably means Herod the Great, because we remember the whole story of Herod the Great killing the Jewish boys and that sort of thing. So, Matthew tells us that Jesus was born when Herod was king. Herod died in 4 BC.

Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem because it was the first year that governor, that Quirinius was governor of Syria. Quirinius became governor of Syria in 6 AD. That's a difference of 10 years. And therein lies our problem. Because Matthew's putting Jesus's birth at a point that's about 10 years earlier than Luke appears to put Jesus's birth.

Furthermore, there's other difficulties with the census that Luke is speaking of. This registering of all people. First of all, Luke references Quirinius, who is governor of Syria. Well, Syria, the governor of Syria had no authority in Judea to collect taxes. And so it's a bit of a mystery why Luke is referring to Quirinius of Syria, who had nothing to do with Judea's taxes anyway.

Furthermore, perhaps a little bit bigger problem, is that there is no evidence of the Roman Empire ever exacting a tax in which people had to travel to their homeland to be registered for that tax. So there's a few problems there that really don't have a good solution to them. There's solutions that are offered.

But quite honestly, they're not completely satisfactory. For one, one solution that's offered is I think it's probably the most common one, is that the census that was completed in the first year of Quirinius rule, 6 AD, was begun much earlier, and it took a number of years to complete it. That kind of makes sense, and that could help to harmonize some of the evidence.

But the point is, I want to point all this out to say, The scriptures are never in contradiction. If we have all the evidence, if we have all the archaeological and historical evidence, we see that they're never in contradiction. The problem is, our knowledge of the ancient world is far from complete.

Don't ever turn on the History Channel and be fooled into thinking that we have a complete, thorough, gapless knowledge of the ancient world. It's a long ways from that. Our knowledge of ancient history contains many such gaps. And when we come across a situation such as this, we say, well, there's not a clear archaeological solution to the difficulty presented in Scripture.

Our response is, well, if we had all the evidence, if we knew all the evidence, then the answer would be clear. I think back to just a few years ago, maybe more than a few years ago now, but you might remember that big hubbub, the big hubbub that was circling around King David, and how people were saying, there's no historical evidence that there ever was a King David.

until there was evidence that was found of the historical King David. So a lot of times it's just a matter of saying we don't have all the evidence, but then ultimately it's a matter of saying our trust is not in archaeology, our trust is in the scriptures. Right now we recognize there's this difficulty.

And we don't have a great solution for it right now, but our trust is still in the scriptures. I say all that now because this is the census tax that Jesus is talking about. This is the very same one. The census tax that according to Luke begun with Jesus birth. That was the situation for Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem was the very same tax that That they come to Jesus now to say, is it right to pay this tax or not?

This particular tax had created a great deal of strife in ancient Israel. Maybe remember from Acts chapter 5 We look in Acts chapter 5 at that situation that's narrated to us in verse 37.

In the days of the census, same word, in the days of the census and drew away people, some of the people after him, he too perished. So this tax was the impetus for at least one armed revolt. That's what a big deal this particular tax was. And it's this tax that they come to Jesus and say, Jesus, is it right for the Caesar to tax Israelites simply because we're alive?

That's what the, it's a headcount tax. They're being taxed simply because they're alive and they live in the Roman jurisdiction. Is that right, Jesus? To be taxed in that way. We can kind of understand the taxes on, on moving animals down the road or driving a cart down the Roman road. We can kind of understand those taxes, though we don't like them.

This is simply a tax because we're Israelites. Is that right or is that wrong? Should we pay them or should we not? Verse 15. But knowing their hypocrisy. Knowing their hypocrisy. You know, it's one thing to know that somebody's flattering you. It's another thing to know their heart. And to know their hypocrisy, but knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, Why put me to the test?

We've noticed before, for example, in chapter 10, that they come to Jesus. I'm sorry, chapter 8, verse 11. The Pharisees came, began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. Or chapter 10, same thing, in order to test him. So it's as though Jesus is saying to them, How long are you going to keep doing this?

How long are you going to keep coming to me to test me with these silly riddles of yours because you're not going to trap me in my words. So why put me to the test? Think back there for just one quick moment. Think back to Jesus words back in chapter one when he goes to the tempter in the wilderness And he says to the tempter do not put the Lord your God to the test Do you see how Mark is comparing for us?

He's making for us this parallel comparison between the religious rulers who are in charge of the temple and the demons. You see that? Last time we noticed the comparison in the sense that just like the demons, the demons knew who Jesus was and yet they still hated him. In the passage last time, the parable, Jesus made it so very plain who he is with the donkey and who they are.

And now, knowing him, seeing that, recognizing that, they hate him. So Mark is drawing this parallel between the temple rulers, and the demons. Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it. So then Jesus says, bring the coin, the denarius, you're probably familiar with the denarius, and let me look at it.

So then they bring him the denarius. They brought him a coin. Notice there, we'll come back to this, but notice that they had one. Notice Jesus didn't have one and that they did have one. So they bring him one. And he holds it up. Whose likeness and inscription is this? They say to him, Caesar's. So, just a word or two about the denarius.

If you'll advance to the next slide, we can actually see a denarius. This is a denarius. That would have been identical to the denarius that Jesus was handed. In fact, there is even a minuscule chance that this is the one, but it would have been identical to this. And you can see on the coin that we've got two faces here.

And so Jesus would have held it up, turned it around. He would have said, whose face is this? Whose image is this? I say Caesars, and he turns it around. Whose inscription is this? So you see the writing around the edges? That writing is a little bit confusing because unlike our coins, you read those coins counterclockwise.

Our coins, you read clockwise, but you read these counterclockwise. The inscription on the face side is this, Ti Caesar Div Aug F Augustus. That's short for Tiberius Caesar Divi or Divine, Augusti, Filius, Augustus. What that literally means is Tiberius Caesar, who was the Caesar at the time, Divine, Great One, F meaning Filius or Son of, Great One.

Augustus, the Great One. So, in essence, it's saying the at least semi divine Tiberius Augustus, son of the divine Augustus. On the back, you see the woman here. That woman is clearly dressed like a priestess, and the inscription around that reads Pontifex Maximus, You can see there the letters Pontiff, Maxim, Pontiffus Maximus, which means literally High Priest.

So on the face you have Son of the Divine One, Tiberius. On the other side you have High Priest. Can you get a sense of how offensive that coin would have been to the Jew? It was literally a pocket idol. It was literally a pocket coin designed to say the most offensive, the most deeply offensive things to the religious Jew of Jesus day.

And so they bring him this denarius, this most offensive coin, and he holds it up, and you can see from the image there, he would hold it up, and he would show maybe the face. He'd say, whose face is this? And he'd turn around, and he'd say, what does that inscription say? And then his answer is, of course, the words that we know, Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to gods the things that are gods.

So, he points out, he points out the face on the coin, and he points out the inscription, and they answer correctly, this is all Caesar's face, this is Caesar's inscription, and he says, Render unto them, Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. One important thing to note here is that Jesus changed the word.

So the question they come to Jesus with is should we pay taxes to Caesar, Jesus's answer, ultimately, is pay the tax to Caesar? No. He says, render unto Caesar. Now, render is a word that we don't often use. It's not, it's sort of one of those words that you don't hear in everyday talk. But the word render is not the same word as the word that they use.

Now, granted, The conversation between Jesus and these Pharisees is not, almost certainly, not taking place in Greek. But, also granted that Mark is faithfully translating from, most likely, the Aramaic that was spoken, or possibly the Hebrew, but most likely the Aramaic, he's faithfully translating into the Greek.

And in that faithful translation is a marked, Change in words. The question is should we pay the tax? Jesus says Render to Caesars what's his so the word pay that's translated pay means just what it sounds like it means to take something That's yours and give it to somebody that's what you do when you pay when you give it's just the word the standard word forgive If I were to reach in my pocket and pull out something that's in my pocket, some keys, if I were to take out some keys that are mine and give these keys to you, then I am doing just that, pay or give them to you.

But then once they're in your possession, if you were to give them back to me, then that's the word render, or give back, or literally pay back. It's very important that Jesus changed the word, because they ask him, should we pay Caesar these taxes? Meaning, should we take what's ours and give it to Caesar?

Jesus answer is, whose face is on this? Oh, Caesar's? Well, give back to Caesar's what's his. You see the difference and you see how Jesus is directing the conversation from a conversation that is basically can Caesar take what's mine to Jesus's answer is, well, why don't you give back to Caesar? What was his to start with?

And that's going to be the basis of how we understand Jesus would render to Caesar. What is his? Are you using his road? Did he pay for that road? Then give back to him what is owed for that. Are you using his bridges? Is your life safer now because of the Roman army who now prevents all this bandit thievery on the road to Jericho?

Are you benefiting from that? Then pay back to him what he has given to you. He even has his face on the coin. You've even got his coin in your pocket. So clearly, you're using his coin. Give it back to him. That's Jesus's, the essence of Jesus's point, is render back to give back what has been given to you.

If you have benefited from the Roman Empire, then pay back what is owed for the benefit that you have received. So Jesus refuses to be conned into this. Oh, should we give Caesar our money give back to him? What is due for what you have received and what you continue to receive from the Roman?

Authorities from the wisdom that they're exercising in their government pagan though They may be they have nonetheless created a society. That's safer Commerce is greater Infrastructure is increased all of these things We're funded by the Roman Empire. Pay back to them what has been given to you as benefit.

So now, render unto Caesar's what is Caesar's. Render unto God what is God's. So now, let's just spend the final few moments just drawing from this just a few observations. Really, these observations are, I'm not sure if it's three or four different observations or the same observations stated three or four different ways because there's so much overlap here.

Let's just take a look at this. First of all, the first thing that I see is that I see just clearly and emphatically that the early church took an incredibly positive view of civil government. There is no doubt that the opinion that the early church has for the governing authorities, the earthly governing authorities, is overwhelmingly positive in the New Testament.

We could look at, for example, What the words of Peter in first Peter chapter to be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution Whether it be the Emperor supreme or the governor's assent by him to punish those who do evil and praise those who do good For this is the will of God that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people Live as people who are free not using your freedom as a cover up for evil But living as servants of God, honor everyone, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the emperor.

That same emperor would crucify Peter. Titus chapter 3 verses 1 and 2. Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil

of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, to show perfect courtesy, Towards all people. We could read the longer passage, Romans 13, there.

We could read the other passage in 1st Timothy 2. All those are written by men who are writing about the emperor at that time, Nero, who would be persecuted and eventually executed by the very same emperor that they're writing about. The early church took an overwhelmingly positive view of civil government.

Now, let me just draw one contrast. A contrast between a view of government in the New Testament and a view of government in the Old Testament. If we were to contrast, and this is perhaps, this is a homework assignment, you can go home this week and do a Bible study, and contrast the view of government in the Old Testament versus the view of government in the New Testament.

The Old Testament government, the books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, we have an overwhelmingly negative view because those governments were largely corrupt. Largely they were run by evil men, wicked men like Ahab and others. So, And the view is largely negative. In the New Testament, we have governments that are run by just as wicked people.

Nero? Yet the view towards government is overwhelmingly positive. Isn't that interesting that the New Testament writers took upon themselves to take the words of Jesus and to take them at heart to say, we as the people of God, we will adopt a positive view of the government over us. Now we might say, well, that was their government, and it was easy for them to say that.

Oh really? You mean the one that put them to death? You mean the one that persecuted the early church with such bloodthirsty violence, that same government? Yeah, that's the same one that they adopt this positive view towards. So that should be the default. The default of the Christian today should be a positive view of the government over us.

As Paul will say, as Peter will say, God has created those bodies To punish evildoers and to reward good. And for that reason, you honor God when you honor them. But then secondly, let's look to the next page. And here's where I think there's a lot of overlap in what we're looking at, but that's okay. But look at this phrase here.

Government is a blessing and an extension of God's gracious and sovereign rule. Therefore, we owe submission in all areas that are not in direct conflict with God's commands. That's a long phrase there. Let's read it again. Government is a blessing and an extension of God's gracious and sovereign rule.

Therefore, we owe submission in all areas that are not in direct conflict with God's commands. Is that not precisely what Jesus said? Render to Caesar that which is Caesar's. If there is submission that is Caesar's, give it to him. Don't withhold from Caesar the submission that is rightfully his. But then render unto God the submission that is due him.

Now, we can see so many examples of this very same thing, in which the people of God render unto, and I'll use metaphorically Caesar here, because there's lots of different rulers in place, but we see so many examples of God's people rendering unto the pagan, godless, leader, a submission that is not just in the words of Paul, eye pleasing, not just lip service, but true and genuine submission.

How many, how many stories do you think we could point to? Do you think we could look to Daniel and the story of Daniel who served the emperor with excellence until it came the point that he had to stop praying to God, which that was the point that he was no longer willing to give? Or render or give back to the emperor what was due the emperor.

He was willing to do all of that up until that point. Or we could take a look at the story of Joseph. We could take a look at the words of the prophets. Startling are the occasions in the prophets in which Israel is rebuked for not giving Babylon total submission. Ezekiel 13, you can read that at home, the whole chapter, Ezekiel 13.

We can look to Jeremiah. Jeremiah on several occasions rebukes Israel because they are not properly submitting to Babylon. So we have that on the one hand, render to Caesar what is Caesar's. But then on the other hand, we have render unto God or give back to God what is due unto God. And so we see this model that is modeled for us in scripture of the citizen of a kingdom of earth that gives unto the Caesar all that is rightfully the Caesars But they clearly know where the boundary lies.

They clearly know where that ends And so, again, we can look to Joseph. Here's a good one to look at. This is an example that I find particularly helpful. It's the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Remember, I think it was about two summers ago that we were studying through that portion of Daniel's prophecy and we were looking at the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and how they're taken out there to the countryside and they're told to bow down to this great big idol of meat.

And it's at that point that they won't do that. And so they stand alone. But then, as they're thrown into that fiery furnace, remember how there was the repeated description of their clothing? And how that description showed beyond doubt that they were wearing Babylonian clothing, not Hebrew clothing? And so they were willing to say, Look, there's nothing that offends God for me to dress like the Babylonians.

And so I will do that. I will give that submission. And then they're thrown into the fiery furnace. You know what's interesting to me in that story of the fiery furnace? There's two commands that Nebuchadnezzar gives. The first command is, when the music stops, bow down. That's the one they're not willing to obey.

What's the second command? Remember? Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, come out. You ever think about that command? What if they had said, come and get us? What if they said, you put us in here, you come and get us out? Because we're having a good old time in here. We're in here fellowshiping. Thank you very much.

These flames aren't hurting us. We don't even smell like smoke in here. It's a whole lot better in here than out there. So, we'll tell you what, Nebby. Come in here and get us.

They didn't do that, did they? They were able to render obedience where obedience could be rendered. Where it could not be rendered, they were willing to die. That's a basic model. Render unto Caesar the things that are due him. Render unto God the things that are due unto God. Then, next on the back page, look at this.

Christians owe a debt to government. It is not the same debt owed to God. Never confuse the two debts. So we owe a debt to government. Clearly in the passage, Jesus' implication here is you are living under certain benefits of the civil government over you. And so clearly you owe something for those benefits that you've received.

In fact, Jesus is most likely teaching in the temple courtyard at this very moment. And who paid for the temple? Herod, ultimately the Romans, paid for the very temple in which Jesus is being confronted, probably at that very moment. So there's a certain debt owed to the government. There's a different debt owed to God.

Never confuse the two debts. Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. Render unto God the things that are God's. What debt do we owe God?

Well, we could start here. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength. We could start there. Is that the same debt owed to Caesar? That's not the debt owed to Caesar. You see, the coin was an illustration that Jesus is using to say, the debt that Caesar is trying to exact from you is the debt of worship.

Never give that to him. In fact, that would be the crux of the matter for the early church, because the Roman Empire, for all of its faults, was extremely tolerant of religious views. Extremely tolerant of religious views. All the kingdoms that they conquered, they were They all had different religions, and the Romans, for the most matter, allowed them to continue.

The only thing was they had to acknowledge what? Caesar's lord. Other than that, we don't care. Worship who you want. Just Caesar's lord, but worship whatever else. And that was the crux of the matter for the early church. That would not say Caesar's lord. That was not the debt due to Caesar, and that's the debt they would not pay to Caesar.

They were told to render to Caesar what's rightfully his.

Jesus holds up the coin and of course, he says, whose likeness is this had Jesus gone further? And again, we don't want to put words in Jesus's mouth, but I think that this is Jesus's train of thought here. When he says whose likeness is on the coin and they say Caesars, isn't the strong implication whose likeness is on you?

Caesar's images on the coin, the coin has Caesar's face stamped on it. Therefore, it's his. Whose image is stamped on you? Whose image are you made in? Therefore, don't confuse these two debts. Don't give unto Caesar the love, devotion, and worship that is due to Christ and Christ alone. To the one who owns you, who created you, stamped you with his image, and then recreated you in the likeness of his son.

Don't confuse those two debts because, lastly, we must always make certain that our rendering to Caesar Does not bleed over into our rendering to God out of place. And even contrary to the gospel is the intermingling of patriotism and faith. You say, oh preacher, you're not getting on that bandwagon again.

'cause we were just on this one a few weeks ago. Well, this is where the Texas brought us once again, because isn't this clearly the strong implication of Jesus's words is to say there is a realm in

which you owe dedication to the state, but that dedication to the state. must never bleed over into your dedication to the kingdom.

And you must always diligently keep those separate and apart from one another. Now, tragically, we live in a cultural context, a church cultural context, in which the bleeding together of these two renderings has taken place over a long period of time, to such a degree now that there are, I think, a Millions of those who attend worship on Sunday morning who would say emphatically that they believe in Jesus and they love Jesus and they belong to Jesus, yet they really cannot articulate a gospel that is devoid of mom, apple pie, and stars and stripes forever.

That somehow the kingdom of Christ has become so infused with the kingdom of the United States that in their thinking the two are inseparable. That the kingdom of God certainly, has found its culmination in the Stars and Stripes Forever. And so for those who have intermingled those two realities to articulate or to even comprehend a gospel that is devoid of rendering to Caesar not only becomes difficult, but actually starts to chip away from their, even their understanding of the gospel itself.

This is why I find so cool. Offensive, the idea, I know the first church I pastored, I had to stand up and preach every Sunday with an American flag behind me. That's why I find that idea so offensive. Not that, not that the stars and stripes are offensive in any way, but it is to say, I am rendering to God what is God's and that's not his.

That's a blessing from him, but that's not the kingdom of God. Think of it this way. Imagine right now, if someone went to walk in and join us on a Sunday morning, and as we got to know them a little bit, they began to profess to us just a deep love for the scriptures, a deep love for the things of God. a conversion that was convincing and true, and we just sensed that we are in the presence of a brother or a sister.

But then as we got to know them a little bit more, we found out that they had just recently moved here from a country that hates the United States. And they were to eventually say to us, you know, I love Jesus, but I hate America. I hate everything America stands for. Could they be accepted among us,

or would there be a stone stumbling for us? Would there be a rock of offense? In our hearts with stars and stripes forever be too intermingled with the kingdom of God for us to be able to love and accept a brother or a sister who was not of the same belief. Don't misunderstand me. Don't mishear me.

We're not at all indicating here that we're not grateful for the blessings that God has bestowed upon us. And we talked this past Wednesday night of spiritual privilege, of the place of spiritual privilege. We thank God for that. We're just taking Jesus's words seriously when he says, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

Render to God the things that are God. And don't confuse the two.

And they marveled at him and turned and left. Don't you just get this sense there? In my mind, I can picture that they're, they're opening their mouth to reply. And then they realize, I don't know what to say. I just, how do you answer that? And so they go away, marvel. They came to test him. But who was really tested?



That's the last point I'll make this morning. They came to examine Christ. They were the ones examined.

Never forget that, brothers and sisters. Christ examines you. He sees everything. He knew their hypocrisy. He knows your heart. He examines us. There is no hidden sin. There is no hidden sin from God. He knows us. He examines us. And I think that's a fitting way to end, to say, always remind yourself of that, brothers and sisters.

He examines you. He examines your heart. He knows you.